The Kargil War

1.1 The Shimla Agreement and the LoC: Cartographic Ambiguities and the Failure to Demarcate Beyond NJ9842

Following the capitulation of Pakistani forces in Dhaka and the cessation of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, the diplomatic architecture of South Asia was fundamentally restructured. On July 2, 1972, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed the Simla Agreement. This watershed treaty was designed to transition bilateral relations away from United Nations mediation, emphasizing direct, bilateral resolution to the Kashmir dispute.

The most operationally significant outcome of the Simla Agreement was the formal conversion of the 1949 Ceasefire Line (CFL)—originally established under the UN-mediated Karachi Agreement—into a newly designated "Line of Control" (LoC).

The Suchetgarh Delineation
The political signing in July was merely the precursor to the grueling military cartography that followed. Between August and December 1972, high-level military delegations met primarily at Suchetgarh to translate the political treaty into a surveyed, delineated boundary. India’s Lt. Gen. Premindra Singh Bhagat and Pakistan’s Lt. Gen. Abdul Hameed Khan oversaw exhaustive map-reading sessions, resolving localized territorial disputes arising from the December 1971 ceasefire positions.

By December 11, 1972, the military representatives authenticated a series of detailed map mosaics, finalizing a demarcated boundary stretching approximately 740 kilometers from the Chhamb sector in the south to the Turtok-Partapur sector in the north. Both nations pledged not to alter this de facto border unilaterally, "irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations".

The Enigma of NJ9842
Despite the remarkable territorial precision achieved during the Suchetgarh talks, a catastrophic cartographic omission occurred at the LoC's northern terminus. The painstakingly surveyed line abruptly halted at a specific Indian Grid coordinate on the Saltoro Mountain Range: **NJ9842** (precisely NJ 38 98000, 13 42000), located at the top of the Chalunka Lungpa valley.

Beyond this coordinate lay the sprawling, inhospitable expanse of the Siachen Glacier and the Karakoram range. The negotiators of both the 1949 Karachi Agreement and the 1972 Simla Agreement operated under the flawed geopolitical assumption that the glacial terrain—averaging 18,000 feet in altitude and blanketed by perennial ice—was entirely unfit for human habitation or military occupation. Consequently, rather than drawing a precise line to the

Chinese border, the treaty's text relied on a vague geographic descriptor inherited from Paragraph B 2 (d) of the 1949 Karachi Agreement, stating simply that the boundary proceeded from the Chalunka region "thence north to the glaciers".

The Cartographic Vacuum

This single phrase created a 60 to 75-kilometer cartographic vacuum. Because the line was never drawn on authenticated maps beyond NJ9842, competing interpretations emerged:

- **The Pakistani Interpretation:** Military planners in Rawalpindi argued the line should project northeast from NJ9842 directly toward the Karakoram Pass, effectively encompassing the Siachen Glacier within Pakistani territory.

- **The Indian Interpretation:** Delhi maintained that according to international boundary norms, the line must proceed strictly north along the watershed line of the Saltoro Ridge, a natural geographic boundary, placing the glacier and its commanding heights firmly under Indian administration.

This failure to demarcate beyond NJ9842 in 1972 sowed the seeds for decades of high-altitude warfare. It directly catalyzed India's preemptive Operation Meghdoot in 1984 to secure the Saltoro Ridge, locking both armies into a grueling, decades-long glacier standoff. Ultimately, the Pakistani military establishment's simmering frustration over the Siachen dispute, born directly from the cartographic ambiguities of the Simla Agreement, would become the psychological and strategic springboard for the Kargil intrusions twenty-five years later.

1.2 The Siachen Precedent (1984): Operation Meghdoot and the Militarization of the Saltoro Ridge

The cartographic ambiguity left at coordinate NJ9842 in the 1972 Simla Agreement remained dormant until the late 1970s, when the high-altitude vacuum gave birth to a phenomenon dubbed "oropolitics"—the political use of mountaineering.

Cartographic Aggression and Oropolitics

In the late 1970s, Indian military intelligence began noting a disturbing trend: international mountaineering journals were publishing maps depicting the Siachen Glacier within Pakistani territory. This was the result of a deliberate campaign by Islamabad to grant climbing permits to foreign expeditions (primarily Japanese and American) traversing the glacier from the Pakistani side. Furthermore, the United States Defense Mapping Agency (DMA) began publishing tactical pilotage charts that connected NJ9842 to the Karakoram Pass in a straight northeastern line, effectively ceding the 76-kilometer-long glacier to Pakistan.

The Indian Reconnaissance

Recognizing the geopolitical threat of these de facto cartographic annexations, India mounted a military response. In 1978, and again in 1981, Colonel Narinder "Bull" Kumar, a highly decorated mountaineer commanding the Indian Army's High Altitude Warfare School (HAWS), led expeditions to the Teram Kangri massif and the Siachen Glacier. Kumar’s teams returned with

physical evidence of Pakistani incursions, including discarded mountaineering gear and foreign expedition wrappers. His detailed topographical surveys provided the essential ground intelligence required for future Indian military operations in the sector.

The Logistics Race and Operation Ababeel

By late 1983, the intelligence war reached a critical inflection point. The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) intercepted information that the Pakistan Army was bulk-purchasing extreme cold-weather gear from specialized suppliers in London. Indian military intelligence rapidly deduced that Pakistan was preparing to physically occupy the commanding passes of the Saltoro Ridge—which forms the western wall of the Siachen Glacier—in the spring of 1984. This planned Pakistani offensive was codenamed **Operation Ababeel**.

Operation Meghdoot: The Preemptive Strike

To preempt the Pakistani occupation, the Indian Army's Northern Command, under Lt. Gen. M.L. Chibber, launched **Operation Meghdoot**. The operation required placing troops at 18,000 to 22,000 feet, an unprecedented feat of high-altitude military deployment.

On April 13, 1984—deliberately timed ahead of the anticipated Pakistani deployment and coinciding with the harvest festival of Baisakhi—the Indian Air Force executed a massive airlift. Flying Cheetah and Mi-8 helicopters stripped of all non-essential weight to survive the thin air, IAF pilots inserted elements of the **4 Kumaon Regiment** and the **Ladakh Scouts**, led by Captain Sanjay Kulkarni. Enduring whiteouts, severe wind chill, and extreme hypoxia, the Indian forces successfully occupied two critical passes on the Saltoro Ridge: **Sia La** and **Bilafond La**. By the time Pakistani forces (the Special Services Group, or SSG) arrived days later, they found the heights already fortified by Indian troops.

Establishment of the AGPL and the Kargil Connection

The ensuing clashes forced Pakistan to occupy the lower, western slopes of the Saltoro Ridge, while India retained control of the commanding heights and the glacier itself. This birthed the **Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL)**, a 110-kilometer militarized frontline stretching north from NJ9842 to Indira Col.

Operation Meghdoot was a profound tactical victory for India but inflicted a deep psychological wound on the Pakistani military establishment. For the next fifteen years, Pakistan launched repeated, bloody, and ultimately futile assaults to dislodge Indian troops from the Saltoro heights. Among the Pakistani commanders who deeply internalized this strategic humiliation was Pervez Musharraf, who had served in the elite SSG and later commanded the Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA). The loss of Siachen became the direct ideological and strategic precursor to Operation Badr. In 1999, Musharraf sought to replicate the Siachen model in reverse: preemptively seizing the unheld winter heights in Kargil to sever India’s vital supply lines and force a withdrawal from the glacier.

1.3 The Winter Posture Protocol: The "Gentlemen's Agreement" and the High-Altitude Vacuum

Along the 168-kilometer stretch of the Line of Control dividing the Kargil district from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)—spanning the Mushkoh Valley, Dras, Kaksar, and Batalik sectors—the jagged ridgelines average between 16,000 and 18,000 feet in elevation. In this

theater, the climate is fundamentally hostile to sustained military presence.

The Tyranny of Terrain and Climate
By mid-November, the region is subjected to extreme sub-arctic conditions. Temperatures routinely plummet to -40°C (-40°F), aggravated by lethal wind chills and blizzards that dump anywhere from 10 to 40 feet of snow. The logistical calculus of maintaining forward pickets during these months was historically deemed prohibitive by both militaries. Stockpiling adequate kerosene, rations, and ammunition for isolated sections was severely constrained, and the casualty rate from High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE), frostbite, and avalanches traditionally outpaced combat casualties.

The Unwritten Modus Operandi
To mitigate these environmental attrition rates, a localized, informal protocol evolved in the years following the 1972 Simla Agreement. Often referred to as the "gentlemen's agreement," it was an unwritten, mutual understanding between the local military formations: India's 121 (Independent) Infantry Brigade headquartered in Kargil, and Pakistan's Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA) headquartered in Gilgit.

Under this tacit arrangement, both armies would voluntarily vacate their most exposed, high-altitude forward posts (such as Bajrang post in the Kaksar sector) at the onset of winter in November. The troops would retreat to lower-altitude winter bases, leaving the fortified *sangars* (stone and sandbag bunkers) empty. In May, as the snowpack began to melt, troops from both sides would ascend and reoccupy their respective summer positions.

The Surveillance Illusion
During this six-month winter window, the vacated ridgelines were technically not abandoned but placed under "winter surveillance." However, this architecture was deeply flawed. It relied heavily on Winter Air Reconnaissance (WAR) conducted by Indian Army Aviation Cheetah helicopters, and sporadic Long Range Patrols (LRPs) by infantrymen.

In reality, extreme weather grounded helicopter sorties for weeks at a time. When infantry patrols were dispatched, they were severely hampered by avalanche risks. Rather than climbing the treacherous ridgelines to physically verify the status of the vacated bunkers, patrols frequently restricted their movements to the valley floors and frozen *nullahs*(watercourses). Consequently, the commanding heights of the LoC were effectively blinded from November to May.

The Fatal Exploitation
This deeply ingrained operational rhythm became India's greatest strategic vulnerability. General Pervez Musharraf and the architects of Operation Badr recognized that the Indian Army's absolute trust in the winter protocol created an unguarded, 500-square-kilometer high-altitude vacuum.

In the winter of 1998–1999, Pakistani Northern Light Infantry (NLI) battalions broke the decades-old gentlemen's agreement. Instead of retreating, they utilized specialized winter gear to cross the LoC and quietly occupy over 130 vacated Indian sangars. By exploiting this predictable withdrawal, Pakistani forces bypassed heavily mined approach routes and established entrenched, dominating positions overlooking National Highway 1A—all without firing a single shot. The protocol designed to save soldiers from the winter had unwittingly handed the enemy the ultimate tactical high ground.

1.4 The Nuclear Umbrella: The 1998 Tests and the Lahore Declaration Deception

On May 11 and 13, 1998, India fundamentally altered the geopolitical equilibrium of South Asia by executing Operation Shakti, conducting five underground nuclear detonations at the Pokhran test range. Barely two weeks later, on May 28 and 30, Pakistan responded with its own series of nuclear tests—Chagai-I and Chagai-II—in the Ras Koh Hills of Balochistan. The subcontinent had crossed the Rubicon, entering an era of overt nuclearization that immediately triggered global sanctions and heightened international anxiety.

The Stability-Instability Paradox
For the architects of Operation Badr at the Pakistan Army General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi, this nuclearization provided a crucial strategic shield. General Pervez Musharraf and his Chief of General Staff, Lt. Gen. Aziz Khan, operated under the framework of the "Stability-Instability Paradox." They theorized that the presence of a mutually assured nuclear deterrent created macro-level stability, effectively neutralizing India's overwhelming conventional military superiority.

The Pakistani military calculus assumed that a localized, sub-conventional territorial grab along the Line of Control (LoC) would not provoke India into launching a full-scale, cross-border conventional war, as had occurred in 1965. GHQ believed the fear of a nuclear exchange would force the international community—specifically the United States—to intervene rapidly, forcing a ceasefire that would cement Pakistan's new cartographic gains in Kargil and internationalize the Kashmir dispute.

Bus Diplomacy and the Lahore Declaration
While Rawalpindi finalized its military logistics, a dramatic diplomatic detente was unfolding on the civilian front. In a bold gesture of peacemaking, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee inaugurated the *Sada-e-Sarhad* (Call of the Frontier) bus service, crossing into Pakistan on February 19, 1999. On February 21, Vajpayee and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed the historic Lahore Declaration. The treaty bound both nations to the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conflict and established critical bilateral Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war.

The Ultimate Deception

The Lahore Summit represented one of the most profound strategic deceptions in modern military history. While Prime Minister Sharif was embracing his Indian counterpart and promising a new era of bilateral peace, advance elements of Pakistan's Northern Light Infantry (NLI) were already executing the infiltration phase of Operation Badr.

As the ink dried on the Lahore Declaration, Pakistani troops, disguised as Kashmiri militants but armed with heavy mortars and Stinger missiles, had already breached the LoC. They were silently occupying the vacated Indian winter posts overlooking National Highway 1A. The juxtaposition of diplomatic handshakes in Lahore and the clandestine military occupation in Dras and Batalik underscored a fatal disconnect between Pakistan's civilian leadership and its military establishment, setting the stage for a brutal, high-altitude collision.

2.1 Topography of the Kargil District: Glacial Geography, Gradient Analysis, and Oxygen Deprivation

To understand the tactical complexities of Operation Vijay, one must first dissect the brutal, unforgiving geomorphology of the Kargil battlefield. Situated within the rain shadow of the Great Himalayan Range, the conflict zone sprawls across the Zanskar Range—a trans-Himalayan expanse characterized by jagged, barren massifs composed primarily of volcanic rock, granite, and loose scree.

The Gradient Asymmetry

The most defining, and militarily consequential, feature of the Kargil topography is its severe gradient asymmetry. The Line of Control (LoC) generally runs along the crest lines of the highest ridges. However, the approaches to these crests are fundamentally different depending on the side of the border:

- **The Northern Approach (Pakistan):** The slopes originating from Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) are relatively gradual. Valleys leading up to the LoC offer manageable inclines, concealed defilades, and established supply routes that allowed the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) to build logistical chains and transport heavy weaponry (like 120mm mortars and Stinger missiles) up to 17,000 feet with relative efficiency.

- **The Southern Approach (India):** Conversely, the Indian side of the LoC is characterized by near-vertical escarpments. To reach the occupied peaks from the Indian staging areas in the valleys (averaging 9,000 to 10,000 feet), Indian infantry battalions had to scale inclines that routinely exceeded 70 to 80 degrees. These approaches were devoid of vegetative cover, exposing climbing troops to direct, plunging fire from the fortified Pakistani *sangars* above.

The Hypoxic Crucible and Rock Scree

At elevations between 16,000 and 18,000 feet, the atmospheric pressure is effectively halved. This hypoxic environment creates an immense physiological toll. For every step taken up an 80-degree incline, the human body struggles against severe oxygen deprivation. Acclimatization, which normally takes weeks, was often compressed into days due to the urgency of the Indian counter-offensive. Troops faced high incidences of High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE), conditions that can be fatal within hours if the soldier is not immediately evacuated to lower altitudes.

Furthermore, the physical composition of the mountains hindered rapid mobility. The slopes are covered in loose, razor-sharp shale and rock scree. A soldier carrying a 25-kilogram battle load (comprising INSAS rifles, additional ammunition, artillery laser-designators, and rations) would frequently slide backward two steps for every three taken forward. The shifting scree also made

stealth impossible during night assaults, as dislodged rocks cascaded down the slopes, alerting enemy sentries.

Combined with wind chills that drove perceived temperatures down to -40°C, the topography of Kargil was not merely a backdrop to the war, but an active, lethal combatant that exacted a massive toll on both armies.

2.2 National Highway 1A (NH1A): The Strategic Vulnerability of the Srinagar-Leh Lifeline

The entire operational calculus of the Pakistani infiltration during Operation Badr rested on the interdiction of a single, fragile ribbon of asphalt: National Highway 1A (now designated as NH 1). Stretching 434 kilometers from Srinagar through Sonamarg, traversing the treacherous 11,500-foot Zoji La pass, and winding through Dras and Kargil before terminating in Leh, this highway is the logistical umbilical cord for the Indian Army's Northern Command.

The Logistical Chokepoint
NH1A's strategic value cannot be overstated. It is the primary overland conduit for supplying not only the 121 (Independent) Infantry Brigade headquartered in Kargil, but more critically, the 102 Infantry Brigade stationed at the Siachen Glacier. Every round of ammunition, liter of kerosene, and kilogram of rations required to sustain Indian troops on the Saltoro Ridge must transit this road. Because Zoji La is rendered impassable by heavy snow from November to May, the Indian military relies on a frantic, six-month "summer stocking" window to push thousands of convoy trucks through to Leh.

Interdiction by Observation
General Pervez Musharraf and the strategists at GHQ Rawalpindi did not need to physically occupy NH1A to choke it. They relied on a doctrinal concept known as *interdiction by observation*. By covertly occupying the commanding heights of the Tololing and Tiger Hill ridgelines in the Dras sector, the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) gained direct, unobstructed visual dominance over a 30-kilometer stretch of the highway.

In some sectors, such as the base of the Tololing massif, the ridgeline sits barely two to three kilometers laterally from the road. From these elevated perches at 15,000 to 16,000 feet, Pakistani Forward Observation Officers (FOOs) could map every curve of the highway and direct devastatingly accurate artillery fire from 105mm and 155mm batteries located safely behind the Line of Control in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The Tactical Paralysis
By mid-May 1999, the effects were immediate and catastrophic. Pakistani artillery began systematic, observed shelling of the highway, specifically targeting the crucial Dras-Kargil stretch and the ammunition dump in Kargil town, which was severely damaged. Daylight movement along NH1A became suicidal. Convoys were forced to drive strictly under the cover of darkness, often without headlights, along cliff-edges, dramatically reducing the throughput of

essential winter supplies destined for Siachen.

The occupation of these heights presented the Indian political and military leadership with a stark ultimatum: allow the winter stocking window to close and face the starvation and freezing of the Siachen brigade, or launch immediate, frontal infantry assaults up near-vertical cliffs to blind the Pakistani observers. This geographic reality forced the Indian Army into the hurried, piecemeal assaults of May 1999, resulting in heavy early casualties before the mobilization of the 8 Mountain Division could properly coordinate the campaign.

2.3 Sector Breakdown: Topographical Mapping of Dras, Kaksar, Mushkoh, and Batalik

The Kargil battlefield was not a monolithic front, but a fractured, 168-kilometer arc divided into four distinct sub-sectors. Each sector presented unique topographical challenges that dictated the pace, tactics, and casualties of the Indian counter-offensive.

- **The Dras Sector (The Epicenter):** Directly overlooking the critical NH1A, Dras is the second coldest continuously inhabited place on Earth. It is dominated by the Tololing massif and the iconic Tiger Hill (Point 5062). The ridges here are razor-sharp with near-vertical drops on the Indian side, making flanking maneuvers nearly impossible. The sheer proximity to the highway (often less than 5 km) made this sector the absolute priority for the 8 Mountain Division.

- **The Mushkoh Valley (The Glacial Corridor):** Situated at the westernmost edge of the conflict zone, Mushkoh is a heavily glaciated valley devoid of civilian population. It offered the Northern Light Infantry a covered infiltration route directly toward the Gurez valley and the Kashmir hinterland. Combat here, specifically around Point 4875, involved navigating deep snow packs and lethal crevasses even in the height of summer.

- **The Kaksar Sector (The Static Front):** Characterized by the imposing Kaksar glacier and jagged peaks reaching 18,000 feet, this sector saw some of the earliest intrusions, including the ambush of Captain Saurabh Kalia at Bajrang Post. Because the terrain was so extreme, neither side could mount large-scale infantry assaults. It devolved into a grueling artillery duel for the duration of the war.

- **The Batalik Sector (The Eastern Flank):** Located east of Kargil town, Batalik is carved by the Indus River. The terrain here transitions from glaciers to jagged, barren rock formations like the Jubar Complex and Khalubar Ridge. The Pakistani objective in Batalik was to sever the supply lines moving toward the Turtuk sector and the Siachen Glacier, forcing India to fight a multi-directional war in the Yaldor sub-sector.

2.4 Meteorological Dynamics: The Weather Weapon and Avalanche Corridors

Beyond the physical rock and gradient, the defining characteristic of the Kargil theater was its lethal micro-climate. At 18,000 feet, the atmosphere undergoes physical changes that actively hinder military operations and weapon ballistics.

Density Altitude and Aviation Limitations
The thin air severely restricted the performance of the Indian Air Force and Army Aviation. Helicopters like the Mi-17 and Cheetah operated at the absolute edge of their flight envelopes. Due to reduced air density (high density altitude), rotor blades generated significantly less lift. A helicopter that could carry a dozen soldiers at sea level could only lift two or three soldiers—or a fraction of its payload in artillery shells—when operating over Tololing or Batalik. This forced the Indian Army to rely on grueling human porterage to supply the assaulting columns.

Artillery Ballistics in the Stratosphere
The meteorological conditions fundamentally altered the mathematics of warfare. Standard firing tables for artillery units were useless in Kargil. The thin air meant that 155mm Bofors shells encountered less aerodynamic drag, causing them to overshoot targets if fired using sea-level calculations. The extreme cold also affected the burn rate of artillery propellants, requiring gunners to rapidly rewrite their firing algorithms through trial and error while under direct enemy observation.

Avalanches as Tactical Weapons
The massive snowpack, destabilized by the onset of summer melting, became a weapon of opportunity. Both the Pakistani defenders and the Indian artillery batteries frequently targeted overhanging cornices and snowpack accumulation zones above enemy positions. A single 120mm mortar round could trigger a slab avalanche capable of sweeping an entire infantry platoon into a gorge.

Whiteouts and Snow Blindness
Sudden cyclonic disturbances routinely generated "whiteout" conditions, reducing visibility to zero and completely neutralizing the advantage of Indian Air Force laser-guided munitions, which required clear line-of-sight to designate targets. Furthermore, the intense ultraviolet radiation reflecting off the snow fields necessitated specialized goggles. Troops who lost or broke their eyewear during night assaults suffered from severe photokeratitis (snow blindness) by midday, rendering them combat-ineffective on the exposed ridges.

3.1 The Architects: The Rawalpindi Cabal and the Genesis of Operation Badr

The conceptualization and execution of Operation Badr were defined by an unprecedented degree of compartmentalization within the Pakistan Armed Forces. The masterplan was not a product of comprehensive inter-services strategic wargaming, but rather the clandestine brain-child of a tightly knit quartet of senior commanders, often referred to by military historians as the "Cabal of Four." This extreme secrecy isolated the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), the Pakistan Navy (PN), and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) from the planning phase, directly seeding the logistical and operational failures that would follow.

General Pervez Musharraf (Chief of Army Staff)
The ideological epicenter of the Kargil intrusion was Gen. Pervez Musharraf. An artillery officer with extensive Special Services Group (SSG) commando experience, Musharraf harbored a deep-seated professional grievance over the 1984 loss of the Siachen Glacier. Having commanded the Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA) in the late 1980s, he had previously proposed variations of the Kargil infiltration plan to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who dismissed it due to the risks of full-scale war. Upon being elevated to COAS in October 1998, bypassing two senior generals, Musharraf finally possessed the supreme authority to operationalize his decade-old ambition. He operated under the conviction that a nuclear deterrent would permanently restrict India from crossing the LoC or opening a conventional front in Punjab or Sindh.

Lt. Gen. Mahmud Ahmad (Commander, X Corps)
Headquartered in Rawalpindi, the formidable X Corps is responsible for the defense of the entire Kashmiri theater. Lt. Gen. Mahmud Ahmad served as the vital operational pivot between the strategic vision of GHQ and the tactical execution on the ground. A staunch hardliner, Ahmad was responsible for allocating the necessary logistical frameworks, artillery support, and troop rotations to sustain the infiltration. He championed the belief that the Indian political leadership was inherently weak and would capitulate to international mediation rather than stomach a high-casualty mountain war.

Maj. Gen. Javed Hassan (Commander, FCNA)
Based in Gilgit, Maj. Gen. Javed Hassan was the man on the ground tasked with the direct execution of the infiltrations. Hassan commanded the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) battalions—troops native to the high-altitude Gilgit-Baltistan region. He was the primary architect of the operation's greatest tactical miscalculation. Hassan convinced the Rawalpindi triad that establishing heavily fortified *sangars* on the Indian heights would create an impenetrable defensive screen. He assured Musharraf that a mere handful of NLI troops could hold off entire Indian brigades, drastically underestimating the Indian Army's willingness to absorb massive casualties to reclaim the topography.

The Chief of General Staff (The Fourth Pillar)
Though often operating in the shadows of the other three, Lt. Gen. Aziz Khan, the Chief of

General Staff (CGS), was the essential fourth pillar. A Kashmiri himself, Aziz managed the Directorate General of Military Operations (DGMO) and handled the critical task of masking the mass movement of NLI troops under the guise of routine winter exercises.

Together, this cabal created a strategic echo chamber. By excluding Air Chief Marshal Parvaiz Mehdi Qureshi and Naval Chief Admiral Fasih Bokhari, the architects of Operation Badr committed tens of thousands of infantrymen to a high-altitude crucible without any dedicated close air support or naval contingency planning, ultimately dooming the tactical brilliance of the initial infiltration.

3.2 Force Composition: The Deployment of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) and Specialized Units

To execute an infiltration of this scale in an environment fundamentally hostile to human survival, GHQ Rawalpindi could not rely on regular infantry formations drawn from the plains of Punjab or Sindh. The success of Operation Badr rested entirely on a specialized force permanently acclimatized to the trans-Himalayan stratospheric environment: the Northern Light Infantry (NLI).

The Vanguard: The Northern Light Infantry (NLI)
Headquartered in Gilgit under the operational control of the Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA), the NLI traced its lineage back to the Gilgit and Karakoram Scouts of the British Indian era. In 1999, the NLI operated as a paramilitary force under the Ministry of Interior, though it was commanded by regular Pakistan Army officers. Crucially, the rank-and-file soldiers were exclusively ethnic Baltis and Shinas native to the mountainous Gilgit-Baltistan region.

This demographic reality provided Pakistan with a massive tactical asymmetry. While Indian Army units drafted from the plains required a grueling, three-to-four-week acclimatization protocol to operate at 18,000 feet without succumbing to High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE), NLI troops were genetically and physiologically adapted to the hypoxic environment. They could scale near-vertical scree slopes carrying heavy combat loads at a pace regular infantry could not match.

Battalion Deployments and Sector Allocation
Maj. Gen. Javed Hassan, Commander FCNA, committed the bulk of his combat power to the infiltration, mobilizing specific NLI battalions across the 168-kilometer arc:

- **Dras and Mushkoh Sectors (Task Force 1):** The crucial Dras heights, dominating National Highway 1A, were occupied primarily by the **6th and 12th Battalions, NLI**. These units constructed the impregnable defensive networks on Tololing and Tiger Hill.

- **Kaksar Sector (Task Force 2):** Tasked with threatening the glacier approaches, the **4th**

and 13th Battalions, NLIwere deployed here, pushing deep into Indian territory and executing the early ambush at Bajrang Post.

- **Batalik Sector:** The **5th Battalion, NLI** (the "Proud Five") spearheaded the multi-pronged intrusion into the Yaldor and Jubar complex, aiming to sever the vital logistics route to the Turtuk sector.

Special Service Group (SSG) Integration
To augment the NLI's defensive capabilities, elements of the elite Special Service Group (SSG)—Pakistan's premier special operations force—were integrated directly into the frontline formations. Three companies of SSG commandos were dispersed among the NLI battalions, specifically in the Dras and Mushkoh sectors. Their primary objective was to coordinate the laying of anti-personnel minefields along the steep Indian approach routes and to operate advanced weaponry.

Logistics and Paramilitary Support
Sustaining over 2,000 troops across 130 forward posts required a monumental logistical chain. GHQ mobilized the **Chitral Scouts** and **Bajaur Scouts** to act as a highly militarized porter corps. Operating along the gradual northern slopes from Gilgit, these scouts transported ammunition, prefabricated fiberglass bunker materials, and heavy weaponry up to the crest lines using mules and sheer human endurance.

The High-Altitude Arsenal
The infiltrated units were armed far beyond standard light infantry loadouts. To dominate the valleys below, the NLI disassembled and transported **12.7mm Heavy Machine Guns (HMGs)** and **120mm heavy mortars**, reassembling them inside stone *sangars* on the peaks. Most critically, to neutralize India's inevitable reliance on rotary-wing air support, the NLI and SSG elements were equipped with shoulder-fired **Anza Mk-II** and **FIM-92 Stinger** Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (MANPADS), creating a lethal anti-aircraft umbrella over the peaks that would claim multiple Indian Air Force aircraft in the opening days of Operation Safed Sagar.

3.3 Logistics and Infiltration: Establishing Supply Lines, High-Altitude Gear, and Fortifying Sangars

The physical execution of Operation Badr began in the brutal depths of the 1998–1999 winter. By exploiting the Indian Army’s reliance on the winter vacation protocol, the Pakistan Army’s Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA) initiated a massive, clandestine logistical buildup that bypassed heavily mined traditional approach routes.

The Logistical Chain: Skardu to the Heights
Sustaining a multi-battalion infiltration across a 168-kilometer front required a logistical spine capable of defying the trans-Himalayan winter. The primary staging ground was Skardu, the

logistical hub for Pakistan's northern military operations. From Skardu, supplies were pushed forward to base camps at Gultari, Kharmang, and Shaqma, which sat just behind the Line of Control (LoC).

Because rotary-wing airlift was severely limited by density altitude and the need for absolute operational secrecy, GHQ Rawalpindi relied entirely on terrestrial transport. Animal transport companies, utilizing specialized mountain mules, carried ammunition, 120mm mortar baseplates, and rations up the gradual northern gradients. Where the terrain became too steep for pack animals, the Chitral and Bajaur Scouts assumed the burden. Operating in extreme hypoxic conditions, these paramilitary porters hauled 30-to-40-kilogram loads up to the 17,000-foot ridgelines, establishing a continuous, concealed umbilical cord between the Gilgit-Baltistan valley floors and the infiltrated peaks.

Procurement of Specialized High-Altitude Gear
Survival, let alone combat effectiveness, at 18,000 feet requires specialized equipment not issued to standard infantry. Drawing direct lessons from their 15-year standoff with India on the Siachen Glacier, the Pakistan Army Quartermaster General’s branch initiated discrete bulk purchases of extreme-cold-weather (ECW) gear from European civilian mountaineering suppliers in late 1998.

The infiltrating Northern Light Infantry (NLI) troops were equipped with white Gore-Tex snow camouflage, double-layered Koflach mountaineering boots designed to prevent frostbite, and polarized snow-goggles to combat photokeratitis (snow blindness). To ensure survival in the vacated Indian posts before permanent fortifications could be built, they carried lightweight, prefabricated fiberglass igloos and high-caloric alpine rations. This logistical foresight meant the NLI could remain static and combat-effective in temperatures plummeting to -40°C, waiting silently for the Indian summer patrols.

Fortifying Sangars: The Impregnable Stone Bunkers
Once the NLI occupied the commanding heights overlooking the Dras, Kaksar, and Batalik valleys, they immediately initiated defensive engineering. Traditional trench warfare is impossible in Kargil; the mountain peaks are composed of solid granite and permafrost, rendering shovels and entrenching tools useless. Instead, both armies rely on *sangars*—above-ground fortifications constructed entirely from dry-stone walls.

Under the direction of attached Special Service Group (SSG) engineers, the NLI dismantled the existing, rudimentary Indian winter sangars and rebuilt them into formidable defensive networks. Using loose boulders, scree, and corrugated iron sheets hauled up from the base camps, they constructed interlocking, multi-tiered sangars.

Crucially, Maj. Gen. Javed Hassan mandated that these fortifications be built on the *reverse slopes* of the ridgelines. By placing the sangars just behind the military crest, the NLI troops were protected from direct, flat-trajectory artillery fire from the Indian valleys below. To engage

the highway or advancing Indian infantry, Pakistani forward observation officers (FOOs) only had to crawl a few meters to the crest line to direct fire, before retreating into the fortified, rock-solid sangars. This specific engineering tactic is what made the subsequent Indian infantry assaults up Tololing and Tiger Hill so devastatingly costly.

4.1 The Intelligence Architecture: RAW, IB, and Military Intelligence Limitations in Winter Surveillance

The most enduring controversy of the 1999 Kargil War remains the systemic intelligence failure that permitted a multi-battalion conventional force to penetrate and occupy up to 15 kilometers of Indian territory completely undetected. The post-war Kargil Review Committee (KRC), chaired by strategic affairs analyst K. Subrahmanyam, delivered a searing indictment of India's intelligence architecture. The failure was not a total absence of information, but rather a catastrophic inability to synthesize isolated data points, exacerbated by entrenched institutional silos and a pervasive cognitive bias.

RAW and the Strategic Blindspot
The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's premier external intelligence agency—led during the war's outbreak by Arvind Dave—was responsible for monitoring strategic military movements in Pakistan. Prior to the conflict, RAW operatives had successfully intercepted communications and logistical procurement data indicating heightened activity in Gilgit-Baltistan. Crucially, RAW tracked the bulk purchase of extreme-cold-weather gear, including specialized mountaineering boots, from European suppliers by the Pakistan Army. However, analytical synthesis failed; RAW analysts concluded this gear was destined for Pakistani troops engaged in the ongoing Siachen Glacier standoff, not a new front in Kargil.

Furthermore, RAW's aerial reconnaissance division, the Aviation Research Centre (ARC), failed to detect the intrusion. The ARC's fleet of Gulfstream and Learjet reconnaissance aircraft did not conduct winter sorties over the Kargil-Dras sector due to a combination of severe weather constraints and a lack of specific tasking requests from the military.

The Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Militant Misclassification
The Intelligence Bureau (IB), tasked with internal security and counter-intelligence, maintained networks within the border regions of Kargil and Leh. The IB Chief at the time, Shyamal Datta, had actually flagged unusual activities; in June 1998, Datta sent a rare signed note to the government alerting them to Pakistani troop movements [cite: 1.2.2]. Additionally, senior intelligence figures like A.S. Dulat, who was with the IB during the Kargil conflict, noted that intelligence reports regarding the intrusion were submitted to the Centre and went up to then Union Home Minister L.K. Advani just before the war [cite: 1.1.2].

Despite these alerts, the fatal flaw in the IB's assessment lay in misclassification. The IB detected the movement of armed personnel but categorized them as "jihadis" or Afghan mercenaries en route to infiltrate the Kashmir Valley to fuel the ongoing insurgency. They fundamentally missed the conventional, regular-army nature of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) battalions.

Military Intelligence (MI) and the Tactical Vacuum
At the operational level, the Directorate General of Military Intelligence (DGMI), headed by Lt.

Gen. Ravi Sawhney, faced severe criticism for its dismal handling of tactical intelligence [cite: 1.3.1]. Ground-level intelligence was primarily the responsibility of the 121 (Independent) Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier Surinder Singh. While Singh claimed to have warned the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General V.P. Malik regarding Pakistan's plans to transgress the LoC a year earlier [cite: 1.3.4], the tactical execution of winter surveillance was deeply flawed.

Winter Air Reconnaissance (WAR) sorties by Army Aviation helicopters were routinely grounded by blizzards. When Long Range Patrols (LRPs) by infantry units were dispatched, they failed to physically climb the ridges to inspect the vacated *sangars*, sticking instead to the valley floors. The military intelligence apparatus suffered from a "Siachen Fixation," believing any Pakistani offensive action would be strictly localized to the glacier, thereby leaving the 168-kilometer Kargil sector fatally under-monitored.

The Cognitive Trap: The "Lahore Effect"
Ultimately, the systemic failure was compounded by a severe cognitive bias at the highest levels of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and the political establishment. The institutional assumption was that the overt nuclearization of the subcontinent in 1998 established a deterrent that made conventional war impossible. This was further reinforced by the political euphoria surrounding the February 1999 Lahore Declaration. The intelligence community and military brass simply could not conceptualize that General Musharraf would risk a conventional territorial land-grab while his Prime Minister was signing a peace treaty. This rigid mindset ensured that the scattered puzzle pieces of the infiltration were never assembled until it was too late.

4.2 The Shepherds' Report: Tashi Namgyal and the Initial Sightings in the Banju Sector

While New Delhi's intelligence apparatus remained paralyzed by the "Lahore Effect" and institutional silos, the first actionable intelligence of the massive Pakistani intrusion came not from a multimillion-dollar reconnaissance satellite or a covert field operative, but from a local civilian armed with a pair of binoculars.

The Missing Yak and the Batalik Heights
In the first week of May 1999, Tashi Namgyal, a 30-year-old resident of Garkhun village in the Aryan Valley, ventured into the high-altitude reaches of the Yaldor sub-sector (Batalik). Following the traditional rhythm of the region's transhumant shepherds, Namgyal had ascended into the barren, snow-covered ridges near the Banju and Jubar heights searching for a missing yak.

On May 2, peering through his binoculars across a ravine, Namgyal observed something profoundly anomalous. He spotted a group of six to eight men stationed on a high ridge. They were not wearing the standard olive-green fatigues or winter whites of the Indian Army; instead, they were clad in dark Pathani suits interspersed with unfamiliar military garments. More alarmingly, these men were actively engaged in military engineering—breaking rocks, clearing snow, and methodically constructing stone *sangars* (bunkers). Namgyal astutely noted an

absolute absence of footprints leading up the ridge from the Indian side of the valley, cementing his realization that these men had scaled the reverse slopes from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Contacting 3 Punjab
Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Namgyal immediately descended the mountain and approached the nearest Indian Army encampment. He reported his findings to the **3rd Battalion, Punjab Regiment (3 Punjab)**, which was responsible for routine patrolling in that specific sector.

Initially, the local guard commander was skeptical, noting that an Indian long-range patrol had recently swept the general vicinity without detecting any hostile presence. However, Namgyal's absolute insistence that the intruders were digging in prompted the battalion command to act.

The First Engagement
On May 3, Namgyal physically guided a small reconnaissance patrol of 20 to 25 soldiers from 3 Punjab back up the treacherous slopes to the vantage point where he had observed the digging. Upon arriving, the Indian patrol realized that the initial six men were merely the vanguard. The ridges were already swarming with heavily armed personnel of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI), equipped with automatic weapons and entrenched in fortified positions.

The subsequent firefight in the Banju area marked the Indian Army's first direct combat contact of the Kargil War. What began as a search for a wandering yak forcefully pierced the veil of GHQ Rawalpindi's strategic deception, alerting the 121 Infantry Brigade that the unwritten winter protocol had been violently breached. Tashi Namgyal's civilian vigilance single-handedly bought the Indian military critical time, serving as the definitive catalyst for the mobilization of Operation Vijay.

4.3 The Bajrang Post Ambush: Captain Saurabh Kalia and the Realization of the Infiltration Scale

While the intelligence gathered in the Batalik sector on May 3 signaled a localized intrusion, the events in the heavily glaciated Kaksar sector two weeks later shattered any remaining illusions within the Indian military establishment. The ambush of a routine reconnaissance patrol forced New Delhi to confront a horrifying reality: the infiltrators were not disorganized militants, but regular Pakistan Army infantry entrenched deeply across multiple sectors.

The Mission to Bajrang Post
In response to the growing unease across the 168-kilometer front, the **4th Battalion, Jat Regiment (4 Jat)**, commanded by Col. Amit Aul, was ordered to physically verify the status of forward winter posts in the Kaksar sector. The primary objective was Bajrang Post, a critical vantage point situated at an altitude of approximately 17,000 feet, which had been vacated the previous winter under the unwritten protocol.

On May 14, 1999, a six-man reconnaissance patrol was dispatched to scale the treacherous snow-covered ridges leading to the post. The patrol was led by **Captain Saurabh Kalia**, a 22-year-old officer who had been commissioned into the Indian Army barely five months prior. He was accompanied by five jawans: Sepoys Arjun Ram, Bhanwar Lal Bagaria, Bhika Ram, Moola Ram, and Naresh Singh.

The Ambush and Capture
As Captain Kalia's patrol approached the vicinity of Bajrang Post on May 15, they were completely unaware that the topography had already been fortified by elements of the Pakistani 4th Battalion, Northern Light Infantry (NLI). The Pakistani troops, holding the high ground and possessing clear lines of sight, allowed the Indian patrol to advance deep into a pre-registered kill zone.

The NLI opened fire with heavy automatic weapons. Captain Kalia and his men immediately returned fire, engaging the numerically superior, entrenched enemy in a desperate firefight that lasted for several hours. The patrol fought valiantly until they entirely exhausted their ammunition. Completely surrounded and cut off from immediate reinforcements by the severe terrain and pinning artillery fire, all six men were captured alive.

The Atrocity and the Strategic Awakening
For the next twenty-two days, the fate of the 4 Jat patrol remained unknown to the Indian command. It was not until June 9, 1999, that the Pakistan Army handed over the bodies of Captain Kalia and his five men to Indian authorities.

The subsequent post-mortem examinations conducted at the Army Hospital in Delhi revealed unprecedented violations of the Geneva Conventions. The autopsy reports documented horrific, systematic torture inflicted while the soldiers were still alive: their eardrums were pierced with hot iron rods, eyes were punctured and removed, teeth broken, skulls fractured, and limbs mutilated, before they were ultimately shot dead.

The mutilation of the 4 Jat patrol acted as a profound psychological and strategic catalyst. Prior to this, the Directorate General of Military Operations (DGMO) and the political leadership were still debating the exact nature of the intruders, clinging to the hope that it was a localized "jihadi" incursion. The extreme brutality, combined with the sophisticated tactical ambush at Bajrang Post, confirmed the absolute involvement of the Pakistan Army's regular forces. It galvanized the Indian public and definitively shifted the military posture from localized containment to a full-scale theater mobilization under Operation Vijay.

5.1 Command Paralysis: The "Jihadi" Delusion and the Misreading of Scale

When the first reports of armed men occupying the Batalik heights reached military headquarters in early May 1999, the Indian Army's chain of command fell victim to a cascading series of cognitive dismissals. The structural inability to rapidly comprehend the sheer scale and conventional nature of the Pakistani infiltration resulted in weeks of fatal command paralysis, costing the Indian infantry dearly in the opening phases of the conflict.

The Counter-Insurgency Mindset
The initial strategic miscalculation originated at the **3 Infantry Division**, headquartered in Leh and commanded by Maj. Gen. V.S. Budhwar. For years, the Indian Army's primary operational focus in Jammu and Kashmir had been internal counter-insurgency (CI) grid operations against separatist militants. When Brigadier Surinder Singh, commander of the **121 (Independent) Infantry Brigade** in Kargil, relayed Tashi Namgyal's intelligence and the subsequent firefights to Leh, it was filtered through this CI lens.

Maj. Gen. Budhwar and his staff initially assessed the intruders as a localized group of Afghan mercenaries or Kashmiri militants ("jihadis") who had managed to slip across the LoC to establish a transit route into the Kashmir Valley. The prevailing belief at 3 Div was that these militants possessed neither the logistical capability nor the tactical discipline to hold high-altitude terrain against regular Indian forces. The division command concluded that a few aggressive infantry patrols would be sufficient to flush them out within 48 to 72 hours.

The Srinagar Filter: XV Corps Assessment
This downplayed assessment was subsequently transmitted up the chain to the **XV Corps** in Srinagar, commanded by Lt. Gen. Kishan Pal. Responsible for the entire Kashmir theater, Lt. Gen. Pal mirrored the skepticism of 3 Div. In a crucial Unified Headquarters meeting in Srinagar on May 19, almost two weeks after the first contact, Pal reportedly assured the political leadership that the situation was a "localized affair" involving a small band of irregulars.

This assessment fundamentally ignored the mounting tactical evidence: the intruders were employing 120mm heavy mortars, utilizing sophisticated radio encryption, and demonstrating coordinated, multi-battalion fire discipline—capabilities entirely absent in militant outfits.

The Cost of Dismissal
This command-level cognitive dissonance translated into catastrophic orders on the ground. Because the higher command refused to acknowledge that they were facing entrenched, regular Pakistan Army battalions (the Northern Light Infantry), they denied 121 Brigade the necessary artillery cover and logistical buildup required for a conventional mountain assault. Infantry units were ordered to march up 16,000-foot ridges in daylight, effectively blind, under the assumption they were merely "evicting" a handful of lightly armed terrorists. This paralysis meant the Indian Army spent the first three weeks of May feeding unsupported platoons into well-prepared Pakistani kill zones.

5.2 Piecemeal Commitments: The Cost of the "Eviction" Mandate

Driven by the higher command's persistent belief that the intrusions were the work of a small, disorganized band of militants, the initial Indian tactical response was doctrinally flawed. Instead of massing forces and preparing a coordinated, multi-battalion assault supported by heavy artillery, the 121 Infantry Brigade was ordered to execute "rush and flush" operations. Small, unsupported patrol and platoon-sized units were sent up the mountains in daylight with the unrealistic mandate to simply "evict" the intruders.

The Doctrinal Disconnect
The tactical reality on the ground was catastrophic. Indian infantrymen, lacking extreme cold-weather clothing and denied the necessary three weeks to acclimatize, were ordered to scale 70 to 80-degree inclines of loose shale and rock scree. Unbeknownst to them, they were walking into pre-registered kill zones established by the Pakistani Northern Light Infantry (NLI), who possessed overwhelming interlocking fields of fire from heavily fortified *sangars*.

The Crucible of 1 Naga and 8 Sikh
In the Dras sector, the burden of these early, blind assaults fell heavily on the **1st Battalion, Naga Regiment (1 Naga)**and the **8th Battalion, Sikh Regiment (8 Sikh)**.

Ordered to secure the Tololing and Tiger Hill approaches respectively, these units faced a wall of lead. The 1 Naga troops, attempting to scale the lower ridges of Point 5140 and Tololing in mid-May, were repeatedly pinned down by sustained 12.7mm heavy machine-gun fire and 120mm mortar barrages. Without designated artillery support to suppress the Pakistani positions, the Nagas suffered severe casualties on the exposed, treeless slopes.

Simultaneously, elements of 8 Sikh were pushed toward the base of Tiger Hill to establish a firm base for future operations. They encountered deeply entrenched NLI and Special Service Group (SSG) commandos. In one horrific engagement, an entire platoon from 8 Sikh was decimated in a localized avalanche triggered intentionally by Pakistani mortar fire, underscoring the lethal combination of terrain and enemy preparedness.

16 Grenadiers in Batalik
A similar tragedy unfolded in the Batalik sector. The **16th Battalion, Grenadiers Regiment (16 Grenadiers)** was hurriedly inducted and ordered to assault the Jubar and Kukarthang ridgelines. Like their counterparts in Dras, they were fed into the meat grinder piecemeal. Operating at 16,000 feet without adequate high-altitude rations or logistical support, the Grenadiers were forced to rely on sheer human wave tactics against a vertically superior enemy. They suffered heavy losses in men and junior officers, failing to dislodge the NLI but succeeding in one grim, vital objective: they definitively exposed the true, massive scale of the Pakistani conventional deployment.

These early, bloody repulses shattered the "jihadi" delusion. The high casualty rates finally

forced the Directorate General of Military Operations (DGMO) in New Delhi to acknowledge that this was not a localized counter-insurgency operation, but a full-scale conventional war demanding the mobilization of the entire 8 Mountain Division and the Indian Air Force.

5.3 Operation Vijay Mobilization: The Integration of XV Corps and the Shifting of 8 Mountain Division

The bloody repulses of mid-May definitively shattered the institutional complacency in New Delhi. When Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General V.P. Malik returned from an official trip to Poland on May 20, he bypassed the optimistic, localized assessments still being forwarded by XV Corps and 3 Infantry Division. Recognizing a multi-battalion conventional invasion by the Pakistan Army, the Directorate General of Military Operations (DGMO) formally sanctioned **Operation Vijay**—a full-scale, theater-level mobilization to reclaim the heights.

The Command Restructuring
The fundamental issue plaguing the early response was command overload. The **3 Infantry Division** (under Maj. Gen. V.S. Budhwar) was simultaneously managing the volatile Siachen Glacier (102 Brigade), the Chinese border in Eastern Ladakh (114 Brigade), and the rapidly deteriorating Kargil-Dras sector (121 Brigade). The 121 Brigade in Kargil, under Brig. Surinder Singh, was buckling under the impossible task of commanding a 168-kilometer active front against entrenched regular infantry.

To rectify this, Lt. Gen. Kishan Pal, General Officer Commanding (GOC) XV Corps, and Lt. Gen. H.M. Khanna, GOC-in-C Northern Command, executed a massive geographic and command reorganization. They bifurcated the war zone. The 3 Infantry Division was ordered to focus exclusively on the eastern theaters (Batalik, Yaldor, and Kaksar). To handle the critical epicenter of the crisis—the Dras and Mushkoh valleys where National Highway 1A was most vulnerable—Army Headquarters initiated the immediate transfer of an entire reserve division.

The Induction of the 8 Mountain Division
The **8 Mountain Division**, commanded by Maj. Gen. Mohinder Puri, was based in Sharifabad in the Kashmir Valley. At the time, the division was heavily committed to the internal counter-insurgency (CI) grid. In a calculated strategic risk, the Indian Army stripped the Valley of these CI forces, gambling that the internal security situation could be managed by paramilitary forces while regular infantry fought the conventional war on the peaks.

The induction of 8 Mountain Division into Dras was a logistical masterclass, executed under direct enemy observation. Convoys of the division's brigades had to navigate the treacherous Zoji La pass and transit the highway under relentless 155mm artillery fire from Pakistani batteries.

Brigade Allocations and the Tactical Pause
Maj. Gen. Puri immediately centralized the fractured command structure in Dras, inducting three

fresh brigades into the crucible:

- **56 Mountain Brigade:** Commanded by Brig. Amar Aul, this formation was tasked with the immediate, critical objective of securing the Tololing massif to lift the direct threat to the highway.

- **192 Mountain Brigade:** Commanded by Brig. M.P.S. Bajwa, held in reserve for the subsequent assaults on Tiger Hill and Point 4875.

- **79 Mountain Brigade:** Commanded by Brig. Ramesh K. Kakkar, deployed to secure the glaciated Mushkoh Valley and plug infiltration routes threatening the Gurez sector.

Simultaneously, to reinforce the struggling Batalik sector under 3 Div, the **70 Infantry Brigade**, commanded by Brig. Devinder Singh, was rushed in from the Kashmir Valley.

Crucially, upon arriving in Dras, Maj. Gen. Puri ordered a highly necessary operational pause. He strictly halted the suicidal, piecemeal daytime patrols. Instead, 8 Mountain Division utilized late May to mass specialized high-altitude equipment, stockpile artillery ammunition, and allow incoming plains-based infantry battalions a condensed—but vital—acclimatization period. The era of the blind "rush and flush" was over; Operation Vijay had transitioned into a deliberate, heavily coordinated campaign of attrition and conventional mountain warfare.